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SUBJECT: 3RD US-SPAIN HIGH LEVEL DEFENSE COMMITTEE REVIEWS  
AFGHANISTAN, KOSOVO, LEBANON, NATO

Classified By: Charge d, Affaires, a.i. Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 b & d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In the third bilateral High Level Defense Committee (HLDC) meeting, held in Madrid on May 17-18, DASD Dan Fata and MOD Secretary General for Policy Luis Cuesta discussed shared strategic interests including the NATO-ISAF operations in Afghanistan, multi-lateral missions in Kosovo and Lebanon, missile defense, Africa and priorities for the 2008 NATO summit. Cuesta said that, having resolved three long-standing bilateral issues in the past few years, he sees no contentious bilateral issues on the horizon. Fata agreed to more regular meetings of the High-Level Defense Committee as useful means to review a wide range of US-Spain military cooperative efforts. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Spain hosted the third HLDC, in Madrid on May 17-18. MOD Secretary General for Policy Luis Cuesta led the Spanish delegation, which included his deputy and representatives from the Deputy Defense Minister's office, the Spanish Joint Staff, the Spanish DATT from Washington, the Permanent Committee, and MFA. DASD Dan Fata, accompanied by Charge, led the US delegation, which also included his Spain Country Desk Officer, representatives from the Joint Staff, EUCOM J-5, the Permanent Committee, and Embassy Madrid, s pol-mil team, including the Defense Attache, Political Counselor, ODC Chief and his Deputy, and Embassy, s pol-mil officer.

-- AFGHANISTAN --

¶3. (C) Fata thanked Spain for its contributions in Afghanistan. He raised four key issues: the importance of training Afghan security forces as quickly as possible; coordination between ISAF and the OEF coalition; improved strategic communications led by the Afghan government; and the need for allies to replace US helicopters that will leave RC-S. Cuesta detailed Spain's current deployment of 688 troops and the work of the Spanish Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). He said that, based on his recent trip to Kabul and Herat, he believes that progress is being made by NATO to help Afghanistan become a stable, sustainable state. He emphasized Spain's agreement with the need to "Afghanize" all aspects of the NATO mission. Fata agreed, saying that even helping ministers and governors to travel around their territory would be a way to assist this effort. Cuesta said that Spain would have two military training teams (OMLTs) comprising around 50 people in Herat in June. These teams would each train a battalion, while separately Spain would "sponsor" an Afghan National Army (ANA) company in Badghis province, where currently there is no ANA presence. He said that Spain is politically unable, because of elections in early 2008, to send more troops for operations, but that there would be no problem sending the training teams.

14. (C) Regarding coordination between ISAF and OEF, Cuesta said that every effort to reduce civilian casualties and ensure proportionate use of force during security missions makes the development mission less difficult. Fata acknowledged discussions of this issue in NATO and said that ISAF has a command position whose responsibility will be to ensure the best possible coordination. Cuesta noted that Pakistani President Musharraf was recently in Spain. He said that Pakistan is making an important contribution to the ISAF mission by deploying on the border, and suggested that Musharraf needs more incentives, including possibly movement on the Kashmir issue, to be able to continue his support. Cuesta suggested a regional conference in Islamabad to show what Afghanistan's neighbors can do to assist. Fata agreed that a military coordination between Afghanistan and Pakistan is good, but that a mechanism for improved political coordination is needed. Cuesta said that Spain found Iran to be a positive presence in the western zone, although recently Spain had become concerned about the effect of the return of Afghan refugees from Iran.

15. (C) Cuesta and his team also pointed to Spain's support for reconstruction in Badkhis province where the Spanish PRT is located. Cuesta described the on-the-ground commanders, flexibility in Afghanistan to undertake Quick Impact reconstruction projects, which aimed at rapid completion to demonstrate to the population that progress is being made. The projects can be simple, and not expensive. The idea had quickly been adopted by the Spanish contingent in Lebanon as well. Fata expressed interest in this subject, as well as the fact that, as Cuesta had noted, General McNeill had praised the military-civilian coordination at the Spanish PRT as a model. Fata suggested that Spain propose a best

MADRID 00000999 002 OF 004

practices conference for PRTs and that this could be part of the Spanish Defense Minister's presentation at the June NATO Defense Ministerial. Fata also suggested, in response to Cuesta's concern that Afghanistan required a better comprehensive strategic approach that Spain also propose to other allies the development of a strategy for success in Afghanistan for the next 3-5 years that would incorporate the military, security, reconstruction and civilian elements. He emphasized that this would not be an exit strategy, but rather one that could chart the course for progress. Cuesta agreed that Spain would begin the process of proposing both ideas at the June Defense Ministerial.

-- KOSOVO --

16. (C) On Kosovo, Fata emphasized the US's strong support for the Ahtisaari plan and the US's work in developing a new UNSC resolution based on that plan. He noted that Russia did not raise its objections to the Ahtisaari plan during Defense Secretary Gates' recent trip to Moscow and said that

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possibly, faced with a united Europe and US, Russia would let the plan move forward. Fata told Cuesta that the US would maintain its current force level for the foreseeable future and asked how Spain felt about the Turkey's efforts to block increased NATO efforts in Kosovo because of linkage to European Defense and Security Policy. Cuesta said that Spain's troops, currently numbering 650, had been in Kosovo for eight years and that Spain supported the EU position on the future of Kosovo. He said Spanish troops would remain as long as the circumstances under which UNSCR 1244 remain, but a new UNSCR is critical to Spain's continued participation if the process leads to independence for Kosovo. He explained that Spain's National Defense Law prohibits deployments that are not established under a UN or other multilateral resolution. Fata asked whether Spain could continue to operate under the umbrella of UNSCR 1244 if a new UNSCR cannot be achieved but the Ahtissari plan elements go forward. Cuesta doubted Spain could keep troops on the

ground if independence is not specifically authorized by a new UNSCR. While underscoring Kosovo's unique situation, Cuesta noted Spain's domestic political concern that those pressing for regional autonomy or even independence in Spain's regions could be emboldened if Spain were to endorse an independence process for Kosovo that was not under a UNSCR resolution. Cuesta expressed his hope that Russia would eventually relent, especially if all parties maintain a dialogue and work methodically to finally reach a political solution. He said that Spain favors "prudent" NATO military planning that does not pre-judge the outcome of final status talks. Cuesta said that Spain had not discussed the NATO issue with Turkey, but believed that Turkey, alone against the other 26 allies, would at some point back down.

-- LEBANON --

17. (C) After a presentation on Spain's command of a multi-national brigade (including India, Nepal, Indonesia, Poland, China, and Finland), Cuesta explained that the UNIFIL mission maintains the ceasefire line so that the international community can explore political resolutions to the conflict. He noted that Spain has recently seen a decrease in Hezbollah activities in its sector. He said that over the course of the mission, Spain had found and turned over to the Lebanese army more than 1000 explosives. Cuesta said that Spain's commitment of 1100 troops to UNIFIL took Spain's total overseas deployments very close to the ceiling of 3000 thus limiting options for additional deployments. He said that Spain applies lessons learned at its Afghanistan PRT to its operations in Lebanon, and has spent 60,000 euros/month on reconstruction projects in its zone. Cuesta acknowledged US concern about continued movement of rockets to Hezbollah, but said that Spain reports all such activities to the Lebanese army. He also said that Spain was equally concerned about potentially provocative overflights by Israeli planes and UAVs, and suggested that the US encourage Israel to be cautious.

-- MISSILE DEFENSE --

18. (C) Fata provided a briefing on the US's plans for a missile defense system, including a detailed explanation of the extensive past and present coordination with Russia. He emphasized the growing threat from the Middle East and explained that providing maximum protection to European allies determined the placement of the proposed new installations. Fata said that Secretary Gates offered additional technical level coordination to the Russians during his recent trip to Moscow in order to overcome

MADRID 00000999 003 OF 004

continued Russian misunderstanding of the project, but noted that Russia continues to be more accepting of the project in private than it is in public. Fata noted the Dutch proposal that the US have direct command and control of both its long-range system (using US protocols) and also NATO's planned short/medium range system (using NATO protocols) to ensure maximum protection. Cuesta asked how much more Russia could be involved in the program. Fata told him that the US would continue to engage Russia at the political and expert level, but that the US couldn't share certain sensitive technology at this point. Cuesta said that Spain appreciates US willingness to design the system to provide protection to NATO allies given the indivisible nature of the alliance, and would support the NATO feasibility study. He said that NATO should focus more attention on short and medium range threats. Cuesta noted that missile defense is likely to remain a major political issue for Russia until after its presidential elections in 2008 and said that Spain would like to be kept informed of the progress of expert level talks.

-- NATO SUMMIT PRIORITIES --

19. (C) Fata explained the US's priorities for the 2008 NATO Summit: a more operational NATO, strengthened capabilities,

and enlargement if the candidates are ready, most likely focused on Albania, Croatia and Macedonia. He raised US concern about recent denial of service attacks against Estonia. Cuesta said that Spain supports enlargement based on merits, generally treating the Balkans as a group but possibly using a differentiated message if Croatia is clearly ahead. He said that it is too early to know how Ukraine's domestic politics will evolve, and said that given Georgia's current issues, a Membership Action Plan (MAP) would be a very large step at this point. Fata responded that MAP would signal that NATO values Georgia's progress and provide additional incentive to resolve current issues. Cuesta said that it would be bad timing to move forward on missile defense and begin MAP for Georgia at the same time. He said that NATO needs to pay more attention to the threats from the south, emphasizing the importance of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the need to give it more resources. Cuesta questioned the notion that NATO could apply Article 5 to an unarmed threat such as denial of service, and said that certainly a response by force would not be appropriate. He acknowledged, however, that NATO's Strategic Concept should include some discussion of how NATO should respond to such cyber threats.

-- NATO RESPONSE FORCE --

¶10. (C) MOD Deputy DG for policy Enrique Perez Ramirez reviewed Spain's strong commitment to the NATO Response Force (NRF), saying that NATO must maintain initial entry as the NRF's key mission rather than allowing NRF to become an operational reserve. He said that if NRF were to become a reserve, allies might reduce their troop offers. Perez said "if you don't use, you lose it" but also noted that "if you abuse it, you might lose it." He proposed that NATO resolve the issue by allowing countries to withdraw forces from NRF in order to send them to ISAF or another mission. This, Perez said, would be the functional equivalent of sending the NRF, but would preserve the NRF's concept. Fata said that the US continues to support initial entry as the key capability of NRF. He said that NRF should focus on capabilities rather than troop numbers, in order to reduce numbers and thus free up some troops for other operations. Fata said that allies need to focus on the crucial 20% of key capabilities that NRF is often missing. He said that NRF and NATO reserves would be a key issue at the Summit and said that the US would soon provide its 3-5 year plan to form the basis for NRF planning.

-- NATO BASES --

¶11. (C) Cuesta said that Spain is carefully following discussions of possible revisions to the NATO command structure, given the potential implications for NATO's CC-Land base outside Madrid. He said that land operations are increasingly important so it wouldn't make sense to close a land base, especially one in southern Europe where NATO should be more focused than ever. He asked for US support to keep the base open, or at least to maintain it as a Deployable Joint Staff Element. Similarly, Cuesta argued that the Spanish base at Zaragoza would be an ideal host for the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system because it currently offers all the facilities needed. He said that Spain is a major contributor to the AGS program. Fata said that the US currently has no position on the location of AGS. He said that he would prefer that the command structure

MADRID 00000999 004 OF 004

issue be resolved below the minister level, but expected that the UK Defense Minister would raise it.

-- BILATERAL ISSUES --

¶12. (C) Both sides agreed that signing the NCIS/OSI regulations was an important step that allowed the relationship to focus on bigger issues, and said that the Permanent Committee (PC) should review and adjust implementation procedures. DG for Policy MG Benito Raggio

said that the regulations were important because they would allow disputes to be resolved at the PC level rather than rising to the political level. Spanish PC President Francisco Hernandez noted that US staffing at Rota and Moron has declined over the past six years. He asked about US intentions for the bases, noting the importance of close coordination on changes that would effect local employment. COL Alex Portelli, from EUCOM J-5, acknowledged the sensitivity of local employment issues, said that US presence at Moron and Rota should stay stable, and noted EUCOM's commitment to early coordination regarding future changes. US PC President COL Ulysses Rhodes noted that despite the recent removal of a P-3 squadron from Rota, no local employees had been fired. Portelli suggested establishing a US-Spain working group to enhance coordination between EUCOM and Spanish MOD. Raggio said that Spain favors the concept of better communication with EUCOM, but noted that that Spain sees the recently revitalized PC as the key organization for resolving bilateral issues. He said that including EUCOM in PC discussions could be the most appropriate mechanism and that Spain would study the proposal.

-- AFRICA and Latin America --

¶13. (C) When Cuesta expressed interest in discussing Africa issues (previously not on the agenda), Fata and Portellio took the opportunity to brief him on the development of AFRICOM, noting that it is a new kind of response to the threats and challenges posed in Africa, one which incorporates military, security, humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism elements. Cuesta and his team were interested in receiving a more extensive briefing on AFRICOM (one is currently being scheduled after having been postponed) and of staying in contact on the issue. Cuesta noted Spain's on-going national security interests in North Africa, and its deepening concerns in West Africa, whose citizens now seek to enter Spain in dramatic boat trips to the Canary Islands and then to the rest of the EU. On Latin America, Cuesta said that Spain maintains an extensive network of military-to-military contacts in the region and that many Latin American military officers receive staff college-style training in Spain. He noted that Spain also now is represented at the Inter-American Defense College, which is a useful tool for regional cooperation, including with the US.

-- ACTION ITEMS --

¶14. (U) The group agreed on the following action items:

-- Spain will check by June with other Allies the possibility of developing a strategy for success as opposed to an exit strategy in Afghanistan.

-- Spain will propose a seminar on lesson learned from PRTs in Afghanistan, covering pre-deployment training, post-deployment analysis, civil military coordination, coordination among High Representatives of international organizations, etc. Spain will announce it at the Ministerial Meeting in June.

-- Enhance Bilateral High Level Defense Committee meetings by making them more flexible and regular.

-- Both parties will continue developing mechanisms for the implementation of the NCIS/OSI agreement and keep them under review.

-- Both parties will keep each other informed of any change affecting local labor personnel at Rota and Moron bases.

-- Both parties will analyze the way to increase coordination between EUCOM and appropriate Spanish counterparts.

¶15. (U) The Embassy will closely monitor and follow-up implementation of agreed action items in the High Level Defense Committee.

¶16. (U) DASD Dan Fata cleared this cable.  
LLORENS